

Psalm 23 Series (Session 3)

by Joseph Carroll

This sermon emphasizes the necessity of cultivating a deep love for Christ as the foundation for a fruitful Christian life.

Duration: 34:34

Scripture: Matthew 22:37

Topics: "Christian Life", "Trust in God's Provision", "Love for God"

Description

Joseph Carroll emphasizes that the Christian life is fundamentally a love relationship with Jesus Christ, which is essential for spiritual growth and harmony. He illustrates that just as a musician must learn scales to create harmony, Christians must cultivate their love for God to truly love others. The sermon highlights the importance of quiet time for intimacy with God, and how this love leads to faith, hope, and obedience. Carroll shares personal anecdotes to demonstrate how God provides for our needs when we trust Him and prioritize our relationship with Him. Ultimately, he urges believers to focus on cultivating their love for Christ to experience the fullness of life and guidance from the Shepherd.

Transcript

John Stopp, one of the great expositors of our day, had this to say. He said, the Christian life is essentially a love relationship to Jesus Christ. Now that's what it is, and that's where it begins.

The Christian life is essentially a love relationship to Jesus Christ. Why are we commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength? Why are we commanded to do that? Does he want somebody to love him, and does he need somebody to love him? Of course he does not. He doesn't have any needs.

That's for your sake. That's for your sake. And that's why Psalm 23 is so very, very important, because it leads us into basic essentials.

There was a young man, or he was a boy at the time, in this city, who went to a music teacher. He said, I want to learn to play the piano. And she said, well, we're going to start with scales.

He said, no, I don't want to learn scales. He said, I want to play something. She said, well, we'll start with scales.

Oh, no, no, I don't want to learn scales. They're very dull, very uninteresting. I want to play something.

She said, you will never know harmony until you learn scales. You will never play anything. Have you ever noticed some Christians in their lives are harmonious? They're joyous, they're peaceful, they're victorious.

There's harmony there. And have you ever known people who profess to be Christians and the opposite is true? Do you know why? They've never learned to play scales. That's why.

And then you put a dozen or so of those people who have never learned to play scales together on a mission field and try to play a symphony. Then you will find out who's learned to play the scales. You'll find out quickly.

Remember in Japan back in 1954 there was one mission leader. He was only about 35. He had gray hair and had had a heart attack already.

He was a mission leader. About 35, 34, he'd had a heart attack and had gray hair. Why? He had a lot of missionaries and he'd never learned to play scales.

Because until you love the Lord, you're not going to love anybody as God wants you to. That's why he puts you've got to love him first. When you learn to love him, you're going to love others as yourself, but not the men.

It cannot be done. You'll gravitate back to yourself all the time. Back to yourself all the time.

There's no alternative to that. Well, let's have a look at our psalm again. He maketh me to lie down.

Yesterday we considered briefly this matter of the quiet time. And the quiet time should be that time when we cultivate our love for Jesus Christ. That's the objective.

The cultivation of love. And that's why I like to call that time my quiet time, because you can only cultivate love in the stillness. You can only be intimate with a person when there is aloneness and stillness.

You also can only cultivate love when you are not conscious of being driven or not conscious of time, a time element. Now, everything else ultimately depends upon your cultivation of your love for the Lord. Everything.

Have you ever noticed the truly great ones of the faith down the centuries? Have you ever read the life, the biographies or autobiographies of such? And right at the heart of it was their love for Christ. Livingston. You will find on a wall there in the dining room Livingston's dedication.

One of our number here gave this to me for my birthday, and so I was that impressed by it. I knew the words, of course, that I placed it there in the dining room. You find it on one of the walls.

The great Livingston. He said, Lord send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me.

Sever any tie, save the tie that binds me to thy heart. He loved his Lord. He said, you can sever any tie.

The tie to my wife, the tie to my children, the tie to my country, sever it, but don't sever that tie that binds me to your heart. Lord Jesus, my King, I sacrifice my life to thee. He says, nothing about winning souls, nothing about evangelism, nothing about Africa.

It's all about his Lord. And because Livingston loved Christ, he loved others. And because he loved others, those others learn to love, you see.

It's contagious. You don't teach love by lectures. You teach love by loving.

And there's no other way. You beget what you are. Everything after its kind.

A disciple can beget a disciple. A teacher can beget a teacher. But only a lover of Christ can beget a lover of Christ.

And that's what Livingston had in his followers. When he died, what did those black men do? They dismembered his body, put it in packages, took it across Africa. Why did they dismember it? If they'd have been caught carrying a body through a village, they'd have been murdered.

You didn't do that. So they dismembered it, put it in small packages and carried it way across Africa, across the Atlantic Ocean to London. Here's Livingston.

That's devotion. That's loyalty. That is love in action.

Why did they love with that tenacity? Because Livingston loved them. That's why. Now, not until you realize the love of Christ are you going to love anybody.

You're always going to have a take back to yourself. Something for me, a blessing for me, my need met, you name it, it's me. How sad.

And it was Livingston. What a testimony. That's why in God's order you love him with all your heart first.

Then you will love your neighbor as yourself. But not until you love him. And love must be cultivated.

Love must be cultivated very carefully. I teach a course on counseling here at the Institute, and of course all the books on counseling come across my desk. There are scores and scores of them.

And I feel at times as if I'd like to counsel against counseling. Teach people to walk with the Lord independent of human aid. That's of course the objective.

But in all these books of counseling I look for one thing. I take a quick look and see what they have to say about faith, hope and love. I haven't found anything in any of them yet about the three.

That is, together. I want to know what they have to say about faith, hope and love. These three.

They're the basis of everything. That's the basis of everything. Where you have love you will have faith, and where you have faith you will have hope.

That's the basis of everything. You take a person whose hope has been shattered and doesn't have faith, what's wrong with the person? They're not experiencing love. You reel the love of Christ to them and the love of Christ for them, and they'll be restored.

Where there is true love there will be faith, and where there's faith there will be hope. And that's what life is all about. We are created with a deep, deep need for love without exception.

And where that love is experienced there will be faith. Who is the person who trusts his Lord? The one who loves him. The one who loves him.

Who is the person who obeys his Lord? Well, of course, the one who loves him. But obedience to him is not a harsh word. It's a beautiful word because it is by his obedience he expresses his love.

It's not a harsh word. It's a beautiful word to the person who loves his Lord. It's an expression of his love.

The man of faith is the man who loves his Lord. The man of hope is the man of faith because he's a man who's loved, and he knows it. Ter Stegen knew that he was loved.

That's why he was such a tremendous man of faith. And the dark clouds can never bother such people. Why? Because the hope is there.

The hope is there. The hope is there because the faith is there, and the faith is there because the love is there. So that for you to neglect, to cultivate your love for Jesus Christ is to court spiritual disaster.

And nothing less than that. So let's underline that. Unless you learn that, you're not going anywhere in the 23rd Psalm because you know what you're going to do? As soon as you get out of the crisis or as soon as your need is met, you're going to forget the shepherd.

And then you go on your own way, and you get in trouble again, and you say, oh, yes, I remember now. I remember those messages on the shepherd. What do you say? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

I have a need here. Lord, meet my need. But you've forgotten the shepherd.

Unless you cultivate your love for him, and unless that becomes the first thing in your life, you are not going to experience the great truths of this psalm. Because one of the great blessings from it is that it's all about you and the shepherd. It's all about you and the shepherd.

This is why it is so very powerful. It brings us to the shepherd, and it leaves us with the shepherd. And that's the secret of it all.

Walking with the Lord. Seeking the Lord. Wanting to know the Lord.

A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, that movement that has sent many hundreds, possibly thousands by now, missionaries to some of the difficult fields of the world. For instance, in Vietnam, when our boys went to Vietnam, they found that the majority of missionaries there were from the Christian and Missionary Alliance, also in Laos, Cambodia. And A.B. Simpson was the man on whose heart God laid a great desire for the evangelization of the world.

He was a Presbyterian preacher to begin with, finally left his Presbyterian renomination. And he made a great discovery. And he wrote a hymn.

It's a beautiful hymn. Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord. And he goes right down the line on the hymn.

Once he sought for blessing, now the Lord. Once for healing, now the Lord. And each verse is something he sought for, but now he seeks only one thing.

The knowledge of his Lord. And of course that was the turning point. Because with the concentration on love for his Lord and knowledge of his Lord will come the what? Will come the guidance.

Will come the knowledge of the will of God. And when A.B. Simpson got to that place, God spoke to him about missions. God spoke to him about his will for his life.

So that preoccupation with the person of Christ is one of the great secrets of the victorious life. Conscious of his presence. Not sometimes, but at all times.

But what is the usual experience? Well, it's a preoccupation with things pertaining to the Christian life rather than with Christ himself. People sometimes ask me, well, you don't take offerings for funds, but you must pray a great deal to the Lord to provide. No.

Not at all. In fact, we never pray to the Lord to provide things. That shocked you? Give us this day our daily bread.

We trust him for daily bread. We thank him for daily bread. We ask for daily bread.

No more. No more. Why? If I am his servant, his love slave, he's obligated to provide for me.

And he will. To tell him what he ought to do, which is an obvious obligation, I think would be rather insulting. I noticed when my children were small, they were not constantly reminding me to provide their meals for them or their clothes.

That was my obligation. That was my privilege. No.

Now, you may not agree with that, but it works. Don't be preoccupied with your needs. That's the truth here.

What were you going to do this morning? Lord, provide this for us. This, this, this, this, this. Come into the shop with us.

Is that all the Lord is to you? A provider? Well, I'll tell you something. If that's all he is, he isn't providing nearly half the things you're asking for. And he will not.

You love him, and he will provide. The person who loves always provides for the one he loves. Of course he does.

But the enemy is a master at having us preoccupied with things and preoccupied with supposed needs. When all the time, and if we had time, I could prove to you that the Lord is always previous. He's always previous.

He's always made provision for that circumstance that you're not even aware of now, and may not be for weeks or months or years. But provision has been made already in the will of God for that. He's always previous.

Always. I must not be tempted to get off on that line. Because I could give you illustration after illustration of how God is always previous.

So don't be taken up with needs and be preoccupied with them. He's always previous. Let me give you an illustration or two.

The first time I went out to Japan in 1954, I was preaching sometimes two or three times a day, every day, very little rest in between. And I was due in Hong Kong for a conference, a Keswick conference in Hong Kong. And I went to the various shipping lines to obtain a berth in Hong Kong, and all the ships were full.

And so I just left it with the Lord, and my last meeting was in Kobe. And after the meeting, a morning meeting, I said to the leader of the mission, I've got to be in Hong Kong by a certain time, but I haven't been able to get a berth on any of the ships. He says, well, there's a French ship in Port Le Camberge.

Maybe they have a berth. I said, oh, no, I inquired about that in Tokyo. And they said they didn't have anything on the ship.

He said, we'll go down anyway and see if they have a berth for you. So we went down to the harbor, and they said, yes, it's sailing this afternoon and we can give you a berth, but it's in an eight berth cabin. I said, fine, I don't care what it's in, as long as it can take me to Hong Kong.

Well, the ship was crowded, and I stepped aboard, and they led me to an eight berth cabin, and I was the only one in it. I had an eight berth cabin all the way to Hong Kong, and everybody else is like sardines. See, that's just a simple little illustration.

The shepherd knows. How could a sheep ever work out with that dumb thing up here what he needs? How foolish can we be? He knows what we need, and he has already provided. As long as you walk with him, he'll lead you into it.

But you must walk with him. He'll lead you into it. In his time, and in his way, and for his glory.

Let me share one other illustration. The experience we had with Anna before we discovered she had cancer. This proves how God is always previous.

The shepherd always goes before to prepare the way. We discovered that Anna had a very low-grade fever in Japan, just before we were to leave for Europe and America. I was to undergo surgery in Europe, so we would go across to Europe for some weeks, and then back to the United States.

And we traveled via Hong Kong. So we took her to an American doctor in Tokyo, and he examined her, and he said, well, maybe tonsillitis. She said, but I can't find anything wrong with the girl.

So when we arrived in Hong Kong, I had a friend there, another medical doctor. He examined her, he said, well, I don't know. And again, maybe tonsillitis.

I just don't know. It doesn't, tonsils look all right, but I just don't know. So we arrived in Germany, and I was hospitalized, and this fever persisted.

It persisted. So I said to Mabel, ask the sisters here in Eidingen if they have a good diagnostician in the area. And they said, yes, we have a very good doctor here.

So he examined Anna very, very carefully. He said, I just don't know. So after a week or two, this fever persisted, and I said to Mabel, we're going to take Anna to the best specialists in this country to see what's wrong with her.

So the two best specialists are the two consultants at the two big medical centers. And Mabel took Anna to both of these consultants. I wanted to know what was wrong with that girl.

You know what they both said? We don't know. Two top specialists in Germany. We don't know.

So we left Germany. We were delayed there. But we left Germany to London.

I asked some friends in London, who's the best man you've got here in London? And they told me a certain person. They said, but he's not here. But there's another man.

He's very good. So we took him to the man, to this doctor. He said, I don't know.

I don't know what's wrong with her. There's something wrong, they said. She's running a fever.

She's been running it for months. I don't know. So we arrived in Ventnor.

Now, at Ventnor you have missionary homes. That is, homes that are put aside. Very, very, very fine homes.

Apartments for missionaries on furlough. It was 12 months previous to this that we had written to Ventnor and asked Ventnor if they had a place for us. Well, it's very difficult to get into Ventnor.

But they said, yes, we have a place for you. So when we arrived in the United States, we went straight to Ventnor, which is near Atlantic City on the coast. And two or three days after we'd settled into Ventnor, Mabel took Anna to the local GP, the general practitioner.

Just another doctor in the area. And he examined Anna. And he said to my wife, you must take her immediately to Philadelphia Children's Hospital.

Immediately. So Mabel came back and said to me, we've got to take Anna to Philadelphia Children's Hospital. We didn't have a car, but a Lutheran missionary, in fact, he drove us to Philadelphia Children's Hospital.

And the doctors there examined Anna and they said she has a Wilms tumor. Wilms tumor? I'd never heard of a Wilms tumor in my life. They said it is a very pernicious, malignant tumor.

So they said, will you please sign this statement so that we can attend to Anna? I said, oh no. They said, well, we can't even give this girl an injection. We can't do a thing for her unless you sign this.

I said, well, I want to call a friend of mine. I have a friend in Savannah, Dr. McGee, cancer specialist. So I called him and I said to him, Harry, Anna has a Wilms tumor and we're here at Philadelphia Children's Hospital.

Do they know what they're doing? He said the Children's Hospital is the hospital in all the world to deal with Wilms tumors. The chief surgeon in charge is the world's leading authority on Wilms tumors, Dr. Coop. See what the Lord did.

Twelve months before he put us on the doorstep of Philadelphia Children's Hospital. We didn't know, twelve months, when we asked to go to bed. And there we were, sixty miles from that hospital.

Finest hospital in all the world. Very fine, evangelistic evangelical heading the whole thing. It pays to trust him.

Who could work that out? We had no place to stay. So the news got through to a friend of ours in Philadelphia, a very wealthy woman. She said, Brother Carroll, I've heard that Anna has some problems.

I said, yes, we're going to have to be in Philadelphia for a while. She said, well, I keep an apartment here for my friends passing through. I'd like you to occupy it.

So here we were on the twenty-third floor of the most expensive apartment complex in Philadelphia. Beautiful, two bedroom apartment. Stay as long as you like.

Then the doctor spoke to us about the surgery and what he was going to do. And I said, well, we will need nurses round the clock for Anna. He said, that's impossible.

I said, well, how many children do you have in this ward? I think he said twenty-three or twenty-four. How many nurses? I said, one. I said, you mean to tell me you only have one nurse looking after all those children? He said, that's all we can get.

He said, we're short of nurses. I can't have nurses round the clock. He said, that's impossible.

They're just not available. Well, I didn't like the idea of my little girl gagging on a tube down her throat in the night with nobody to attend to. So I went back to the apartment and I prayed.

I said, Lord, what is your answer to this? And as I prayed, the conviction came I should ring the CIM headquarters in Philadelphia, China Inland Mission, Overseas Missionary Fellowship. So I did. And I asked for a friend of mine, Arthur Glasser, who was a North American director.

But he wasn't present. But another friend of mine was present. And I explained the position to him.

I said, do you know where we can get any nurses in Philadelphia? He said, well, Joe, we are having a course here now for prospective missionaries. And we have eight registered nurses. So Anna had these beautiful Christian girls caring for her round the clock.

Not only at night, but also during the day. Eight of them. You see, that's the shepherd in action.

Do you see that? He is always previous. Why don't you lie down? Why don't you lie down? Why don't you rest? Why don't you trust him? He's always previous. We're concerned about little things such as bread and butter, clothing, what we're going to eat, what we're going to drink, what we're going to wear.

Well, the heathen are concerned about that too. He maketh me to lie down. But you're never going to lie down until you know the shepherd intimately.

You are not going to do it. And you are never going to know the shepherd intimately until you learn to cultivate your love for him in the aloneness of fellowship with him every day of your life. That's the key to the whole thing.

What is the emphasis? Get up and go. Well, go where? Go where? You know, I've heard it said concerning our little school here that that school is divorced from the real world, if only it were. They're too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use over there.

Well, my friend, your heavenly mindedness will determine your earthly usefulness. They're too divorced. They're divorced from the real world.

Well, all I say to that is, the Lord sent Paul to Arabia for three years. I wonder why. Get him away from that crazy world.

Speak to him. The world is not the basic problem, the self-life is. That's the problem.

It doesn't matter where you go, you take it with you. The world isn't the problem, the devil isn't the problem, it's that self-life in you that the devil can activate and he can use the world to activate it. But the world isn't the problem, my friend, and Satan is not the problem, it's you.

It's me. It's that fallen nature within us, that's the problem. And it's not until you learn to be still and learn to be quiet and learn how to be quiet and learn how to cultivate your life with your Lord that you're going to go anywhere with the Lord.

Or anywhere for him. And achieve anything for him. So that he makes you to lie down.

And he makes us to lie down in green pastures and leads us beside still waters. He's the great provider. Why don't you let him provide for you? When Mabel and I were married in Japan, she had two churches which supported her.

One wrote to her and said, now that you are married and no longer a missionary, we cannot support you. Well, I thought that was a little strange. But then the other one was stranger still.

Her home church was an independent church, that is a non-denominational church. So they said, this independent church said, now that you have married an independent missionary, we can no longer support you. So I said to Mabel, fine.

Now you have an opportunity to trust the Lord. And she did. All her support cut off.

Hallelujah. We've never wanted from that day to this. We've always had enough.

Always enough. In those early days the Lord had to teach Mabel his sufficiency and very often we were scraping the bottom of the barrel but not quite through it. But this is his way.

This is his way. I recall we had to go to Hong Kong again for another Keswick convention. And it was three weeks after we were married and Mabel and I went together.

And first or second night of the conference she said, well, wouldn't it be nice if we went and had something, a little snack to eat, you know. I said, fine. So we went to this restaurant in Hong Kong and she looked at the menu and she said, well, what do you think about this? I said, oh no, I don't think we should have that.

What about this? No, I don't think we should have that either. So we got down to sharing toast. We finally got down to sharing toast because we didn't have any money for anything more than that.

That was enough. You know what the Lord did? Before I left America, about, oh, two years before we were married, I sold a car to a brother in Asheville and he'd only paid a certain amount and he never paid anything else anymore on the car and he owed me \$400. But I never said a word to him.

But whilst we were there in Hong Kong, practically penniless, a letter which had been in the mail for three months following me around the world arrived in Hong Kong with the \$400 in it. And all the postmarks on

it, it had been everywhere. It had been everywhere.

It had been to Australia, it had been to Japan, and finally finished up in Hong Kong. Right when we needed it. He's a faithful shepherd.

Why don't you lie down and trust him? He's always previous. Shall we pray? Father, forgive our foolish ways. Our foolish ways.

And teach us Thy ways. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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